

Top Secret 39



25X1

MEMORANDUM

Special Assessments on the Middle East Situation

THE SOVIET GENERAL ASSEMBLY GAMBIT

Top Secret

46

15 June 1967

25X1

State Dept. review
completed

Page Denied

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
15 June 1967

SOVIET POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS:
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY GAMBIT

1. If Soviet policy in the Middle East crisis seemed muscle-bound and ineffectual during the fast-moving military events of the week of 5 June, Moscow is evidently determined to compensate with a show of energy and initiative in the present political phase. It has chosen the largest and most conspicuous stage, the General Assembly, for an act of diplomatic-propaganda theater aimed at turning the Arabs' military defeat into political gains for the USSR.

The Tactical Situation in the Assembly

2. The Soviets apparently judge that the issues posed between the parties in the devolution phase of the crisis give the USSR tactical advantages. They believe that many Afro-Asian states at the UN will be receptive to Soviet arguments that it was Israel which commenced hostilities by a surprise attack, that she holds by force substantial portions of the territory of three Arab states, and that the first step to peace must be restoration of the status quo ante. Soviet demagoguery will try to override the more complex issues associated with Israeli demands for a fundamental settlement.

3. While it is likely that the Assembly will provide a more congenial atmosphere for Soviet efforts along these lines than the Security Council has, it is far from clear that Moscow has correctly assessed its bargaining position. Sentiment is one thing, but translating this into support for a specific resolution is another. Moreover, initial comment from New York strongly suggests that the Soviet maneuvering has been overly transparent. While there appears to be no disposition to oppose a debate in the Assembly, many

delegations have commented that they consider Soviet objectives purely propagandistic. They are dubious that the Assembly has a role to play in such an emotion-laden issue, and some at least believe Moscow is merely "using" the Assembly as a cover for big power talks. This less than enthusiastic reaction has come even from those the Soviets have been trying to impress, including some of the Arab powers.

4. Formally, the USSR's demand will be for the Assembly to adopt the Soviet resolution which failed in the Security Council--that Israel be condemned for aggression and that she be required to withdraw forthwith behind the pre-existing armistice lines. If the necessary two-thirds majority could be obtained, an unlikely outcome, and if Israel then refused to comply, presumably the Soviets would demand sanctions of some sort. These would almost certainly be confined to measures of a political and economic character, since the Soviets would probably not expect the Assembly to follow them in a demand for military sanctions and would not themselves be prepared to execute such sanctions. They might make further gestures of military support for the Arabs, however, if a stalemate set in.

5. A proposition which probably would have considerable appeal in the Assembly would be one which required the Israelis to give up their territorial gains, but offered a formula for reopening the Strait of Tiran. There seems a good chance that the Soviets would suggest this maneuver to Cairo, and perhaps also that Nasir would feel obliged to accept. The Soviets could argue that such a move would maximize pressure on Israel in the UN and promote strains between Israel and the US.

6. For the Soviets, resolutions the Assembly might adopt or actions it might authorize would be less important than the function it would serve as a propaganda sounding board. They would be counting primarily on the political pressures they could generate. The object would be to isolate

15 June 1967

Israel, and the US as its principal supporter. The Soviets would hope thereby to force Israel to accept minimum terms. At the very least, they would expect to make a verbal record pleasing to the frustrated Arabs.

7. Kosygin's presence at the General Assembly, which would probably trigger the attendance of other "leading statesmen," would not affect the tactics pursued by the Soviets in the session, but would be intended primarily to heighten the drama and thereby to intensify pressures on the US and on Israel. In particular, Kosygin's presence would not be a sign that the Soviets intended to work for a more constructive outcome. If a summit meeting occurred, the Soviets would try to give an impression of Israel's isolation and would represent whatever issued from such a meeting as a triumph of Soviet diplomacy on behalf of the Arab cause. The Soviets may think that the President could be induced to put pressure on Israel in return for a promise of helpful Soviet influence in Hanoi. But there is no serious indication that Moscow has either the desire or the ability to affect Hanoi's present course.

8. If an emergency session of the Assembly is held, it is unlikely to find majorities necessary for any constructive action. Publicity will help to hold the Arab front firm, and the Israelis in their present mood will not budge from the Arab territory they hold, knowing that this is their principal bargaining counter. After some period of futile oratory, a mood is likely to emerge in the Assembly that the issue should be referred back to the Security Council or to some ad hoc group. Only then could serious negotiations begin, although the performances which would have been made in the Assembly would not be likely to facilitate such negotiations.

Soviet Aims in the Present Phase

9. The Soviets probably estimate that, though the Arab-Israeli war has produced a very complicated

15 June 1967

situation involving considerable political risks for them, it is also a situation which offers them opportunities. At present, they probably have in mind the following principal objectives:

a. They wish to demonstrate to the Arab States that their value as a great power sponsor is after all substantial. They think it urgent to arrest the rumblings in the Arab world that their support in the crisis thus far has been something less than reliable and effective. This they hope to be by ensuring an outcome, mainly by pressures in the UN, which will minimize Israel's gains from the war, and leave the Arabs with the comforting feeling that they are widely supported and can pursue their vendetta against Israel with good heart for the future.

b. The Soviets will hope to preserve radical and pro-Soviet tendencies in Arab politics, and if possible to give a new impulse to radicalization in the more conservative Arab States. This means holding the Syrian regime in place, preventing any backsliding in connection with the political shuffle which seems to be developing in Cairo, and perhaps promoting a political upset in one of the more conservative Arab regimes. Libya seems vulnerable, and its Western bases offer a good target for radical Arab pressure.

c. The Soviets will be concerned to consolidate the reversal suffered by the US in the Arab world and to ensure that no recovery occurs as the crisis fades. In the immediate situation, any support by the US for a settlement which would take account of Israel's security interests will be construed by Soviet propaganda in such a way as to make identification of the US with Israel still more indelible in the Arab mind.

d. The Soviets are also thinking of the broader Afro-Asian setting. They want to use the occasion to fix in the minds of political leaders in the Third World an image of the US as an imperialist aggressor, acting in this case through its agent Israel, but committed everywhere to violence against

15 June 1967

"freedom-loving" states. They evidently have in mind not only the opportunity to put some new steam behind their persistent "anti-imperialist" theme, but also the usefulness of such imagery in connection with Vietnam.

10. These Soviet aims are largely of a tactical nature and do not mean that Moscow has yet been able to chart a longer term course for the new situation which the war has created in the Middle East. The line attributed to the Soviets above in the immediate situation would serve as a holding action intended to keep the way open for continuation of the policies they have been pursuing in the Arab world. Probably the Soviets now think that the policy of cultivating the radical Arabs, supporting their intransigence against Israel, and providing generous military aid is still their best course. Whether Moscow will still think this when all the political repercussions among the Arabs of their military debacle are registered will depend on what those repercussions are. A period of cautious re-evaluation of Soviet policy may ensue once the present tensions subside.

15 June 1967

Top Secret

25X1



Top Secret